



Shawnee Mission School District  
Overland Park, Kansas  
Cell Phone Policy Communication  
2025 Golden Achievement Award Entry

## Research

The use of personal devices, including cell phones, at school has been a topic of strong community interest. At the start of the 2024-25 school year, a Strategic Plan action team was tasked with developing recommendations for a universal personal electronic device policy for the Shawnee Mission School District. On January 13, 2025, the Board of Education approved policy JCDC: Restrictions on Possession and Use of Personal Electronic Devices.

As the policy was being discussed and developed, the communications team took a strategic, research-driven approach to ensure effective messaging around the new policy. Understanding that personal electronic device restrictions are a high-interest subject, the team reached out to neighboring districts to learn how they had communicated similar policy changes at the start of the 2024-25 school year. By gathering insights from these districts, including what worked well and what challenges they faced, SMSD was able to craft a communication plan that addressed potential concerns proactively. In addition, the team reviewed past community feedback and engagement trends, recognizing that clear, early, and multi-platform messaging would be critical to a smooth implementation.

## Analysis/Planning

Given the high level of public interest in the policy change, the communications plan was designed for transparency, accessibility, and consistency across all audiences. The team identified principal interest groups as staff, families, students, and the broader community, and tailored messaging for each group. Messaging in English and Spanish was developed to answer anticipated questions and concerns, ensuring that communications were clear on how the policy applied to elementary, middle, and high school students. The plan incorporated multiple communication channels to maximize reach and reinforce messaging over time. Key messaging would regularly and intentionally reiterate information about the decision-making process, which was informed in part by Strategic Plan work and a large-scale ThoughtExchange facilitated by the Communications Team. This ThoughtExchange drew one of the highest response rates in district history for a ThoughtExchange.

## Communication/Implementation

The communication rollout was structured to deliver timely and consistent messaging across multiple platforms:

- Official Announcement: The policy was publicly announced at the January 13, 2025, Board of Education meeting, followed by a district-wide email to staff, families, and community members summarizing the changes.
- Internal Communication: Staff received direct emails and newsletter updates with talking points to ensure they could confidently communicate the policy within their schools.
- Community Outreach: The district’s website featured news articles explaining the policy, supplemented by a paid column in a hyper-local online news source to expand reach.
- Visual Aids: A graphic illustrating how the policy applies at different school levels was created and widely distributed.
- School-Level Engagement: Principals received shareable content and talking points to include in their school newsletters, ensuring consistency in messaging across the district.
- Media Engagement: The Chief Communications Officer engaged in interviews with local news, helping to further amplify the district’s messaging and reinforce the points of the policy.

## Evaluation

The effectiveness of the communication plan was evident in the outcomes:

- Decline in public concerns: Following the communication push, there was a noticeable reduction in public comments at board meetings regarding the policy.
- Community awareness: Principals reported that their school communities were well-informed about the changes, leading to a smoother mid-year transition with minimal issues reported.
- Positive media feedback: A local news producer complimented the district’s communication efforts, highlighting the clarity and effectiveness of the rollout compared to similar-sized districts in our metropolitan area

## Supplemental Material

Description	
Personal Electronic Device Policy Talking Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The Shawnee Mission School District is committed to providing highly effective and consistent learning spaces across the district.</li> <li>● The personal electronic device policy is designed to minimize distractions, helping students stay focused and connected to their learning and peers throughout the school day.</li> <li>● We have taken an age-appropriate approach by tailoring</li> </ul>

	<p>the policy to address developmental needs of students at each school level.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At the elementary and middle school levels, the policy will help students build awareness and understanding of healthy technology use.</li> <li>• By limiting device use during the school day, high school students can focus more on in-person interactions and more fully participate in an interactive learning environment.</li> <li>• This policy is a proactive step in addressing the addictive nature of social media and fostering healthier digital habits for all students.</li> </ul>
<p>Internal Communication Email/Newsletter</p>	<p>Subject: New Personal Electronic Device Policy Approved</p> <p>Dear Colleagues,</p> <p>At the January 13, 2025, Board of Education meeting, the Board approved policy JCDC: Restrictions on Possession and Use of Personal Electronic Devices. <a href="#">Click here to read the policy.</a> Full implementation of this policy will begin on February 3, 2025. This policy was developed in response to feedback from students, parents, and staff about how these devices can disrupt learning and negatively impact the mental and emotional health of students.</p> <p>This fall, the Strategic Plan Action Team 4.1.3 worked to create a policy recommendation on age-appropriate use of personal electronic devices in our schools. Their thoughtful recommendations included input from 25 members representing teachers, administrators, students, parents, and community members. Their work also included feedback gathered through a district-wide ThoughtExchange, ensuring many voices and opinions were heard. This process has also been informed with the advice of SMSD principals, educators at all age levels, and students and staff in the Superintendent’s advisory committees. You can see more detail about this process outlined in this presentation, <a href="#">linked here</a>, delivered to the Board of Education at the Jan. 13, 2025 meeting.</p> <p>SMSD is committed to providing highly effective and consistent learning spaces across the district. We understand the challenges you face in managing classroom distractions caused by personal devices, and this policy aims to provide consistent, districtwide support to address those challenges.</p> <p>While this policy is not significantly different from many of our school’s practices, it provides consistent expectations across the district. Thank you for your partnership in helping us maintain a</p>

	positive school environment.
<b>External Communication Email</b>	<p>Subject: New Policy on Personal Device Use in Classrooms</p> <p>Shawnee Mission School District Families,</p> <p>At the January 13, 2025, Board of Education meeting, the Board approved policy JCDC: Restrictions on Possession and Use of Personal Electronic Devices. <a href="#">Click here to read the policy.</a> Full implementation of this policy will begin on February 3, 2025.</p> <p>This policy was developed in response to feedback and concerns raised by students, parents, and staff about how these devices can disrupt learning and negatively impact the mental and emotional health of students. Our mission, as defined in our <a href="#">Strategic Plan</a>, continues to be that we help each student achieve their full potential.</p> <p>This fall, a Strategic Plan Action Team worked to create a policy recommendation on age-appropriate use of personal electronic devices in our schools. Their thoughtful recommendations included input from 25 Action Team members representing teachers, administrators, students, parents, and community members. Their work also included feedback gathered through a district-wide Thought Exchange ensuring many voices and opinions were included. This process has also been informed with the advice of SMSD principals, educators of all age levels, and students and staff in the Superintendent’s advisory committees. You can see more detail about this process outlined in this presentation, <a href="#">linked here</a>, delivered to the Board of Education at the Jan. 13, 2025 meeting.</p> <p>The Shawnee Mission School District is committed to providing highly effective and consistent learning spaces across the district.</p> <p><b>Personal Electronic Device Policy</b></p> <p><b>Elementary School</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Personal electronic devices (like cell phones) should stay in backpacks or personal storage bags during the school day. If a backpack or bag isn’t available, devices should be left at home.</li> <li>● All devices need to be silenced or set to “school” or “do not disturb” mode while at school.</li> </ul> <p><b>Middle School</b></p>

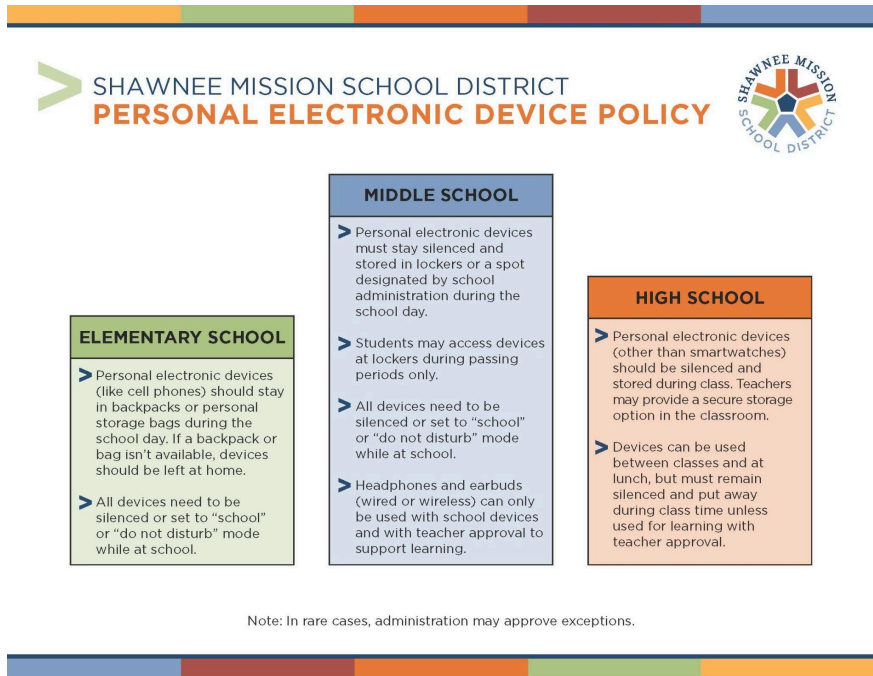
- Personal electronic devices must stay silenced and stored in lockers or a spot designated by school administration during the school day.
- Students may access devices at lockers during passing periods only.
- All devices need to be silenced or set to “school” or “do not disturb” mode while at school.
- Headphones and earbuds (wired or wireless) can only be used with school devices and with teacher approval to support learning.

### **High School**

- Personal electronic devices to include the use of cell phones and headphones (other than smartwatches) should be silenced and stored during class. Teachers may provide a secure storage option in the classroom.
- Devices can be used between classes and at lunch, but must remain silenced and put away during class time unless used for learning with teacher approval.

Note: In rare cases, administration may approve exceptions.

While our schools will guide students on using personal electronic devices appropriately, we know this change will succeed with the support of our families. Thank you for your partnership in helping us maintain a positive school environment.

<p>Graphic</p>	 <p><b>SHAWNEE MISSION SCHOOL DISTRICT</b> <b>PERSONAL ELECTRONIC DEVICE POLICY</b></p> <p><b>ELEMENTARY SCHOOL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Personal electronic devices (like cell phones) should stay in backpacks or personal storage bags during the school day. If a backpack or bag isn't available, devices should be left at home.</li> <li>➤ All devices need to be silenced or set to "school" or "do not disturb" mode while at school.</li> </ul> <p><b>MIDDLE SCHOOL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Personal electronic devices must stay silenced and stored in lockers or a spot designated by school administration during the school day.</li> <li>➤ Students may access devices at lockers during passing periods only.</li> <li>➤ All devices need to be silenced or set to "school" or "do not disturb" mode while at school.</li> <li>➤ Headphones and earbuds (wired or wireless) can only be used with school devices and with teacher approval to support learning.</li> </ul> <p><b>HIGH SCHOOL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Personal electronic devices (other than smartwatches) should be silenced and stored during class. Teachers may provide a secure storage option in the classroom.</li> <li>➤ Devices can be used between classes and at lunch, but must remain silenced and put away during class time unless used for learning with teacher approval.</li> </ul> <p>Note: In rare cases, administration may approve exceptions.</p>
<p>Website story</p>	<p><a href="https://www.smsd.org/about/news-archives/news-archive-details/~board/2024-2025-district-news/post/new-policy-on-personal-device-use-in-classrooms">https://www.smsd.org/about/news-archives/news-archive-details/~board/2024-2025-district-news/post/new-policy-on-personal-device-use-in-classrooms</a></p>
<p>Paid media post</p>	<p><a href="https://johnsoncountypost.com/2025/01/17/smsd-news-new-policy-on-personal-device-use-in-classrooms-251262/">https://johnsoncountypost.com/2025/01/17/smsd-news-new-policy-on-personal-device-use-in-classrooms-251262/</a></p>